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CIA/OSR /TF 750814 ASSESSMENT OF ROLE THE PORTUGUESE ARMED
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CIA/OSR

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MEMORANDUM

An Assessment of the Role the Portuguese Armed Forces
Might Play in the Current Political Crisis

In the event the current political crisis in Portugal becomes increasingly violent or results in a civil war, the 100,000-man military establishment has the capability to play a decisive role. However, an analysis of the likely political orientation and loyalty of the Portuguese armed forces indicates that there are sharp divergences in political viewpoint within the armed forces, that officers appear to have little authority or influence over their men, and that a substantial body of both officers and men tend to wait to see which way the wind is blowing before committing themselves politically.

The vast majority of the Portuguese people are strongly opposed to the radical leftists now ruling the country, and there are strong indications that a new leadership advocating a more moderate course will soon be in power. It seems to have taken the violent protests of the civilian population and the expressed sympathy of a majority of the troops for the same cause to give a large body of moderate officers the courage to openly advocate a more moderate government. Should the pro-Communist government succeed in maintaining power, however, or should a third faction emerge with an alternative solution, the military might again shift with the tide.

Note: This memorandum was prepared in the Western Forces Branch, TFD. Please address any comments to [REDACTED] x5257, R1770.

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SUBJECT TO CENTRAL RECLASSIFICATION SCHEDULE
OF E. O. 11652, AUTOMATICALLY DECLASSIFIED AT
TWO YEAR INTERVALS AND EXTENDED ON

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Discussion

1. The capabilities and potential political orientation of Portugal's military forces have been examined from two basic perspectives: how well they are prepared to play their basic role as guarantor of domestic peace and internal security in light of the increasingly militant actions of opposing political factions, and how they may line up in the event of a civil war.

Military Strength and Capabilities

2. The military forces currently on duty in the metropol: are estimated to number about 103,550 including 65,000 in the army, 10,450 in the air force, 1,700 in the navy (marines only) and 26,400 in the paramilitary forces. Units assigned to the elite Continental Operations Command (COPCON) come from all three of the services and are included within these figures. An army commando regiment of approximately 1,000 men, a battalion-sized marine unit of approximately 500 men, and a 2,200-man parachute unit from the air force make up the assigned units of COPCON. With headquarters and support staff it totals about 4,000 men. However, General Otelo de Carvalho, the commander of COPCON, has the authority to call upon any Portuguese army or police unit for special security purposes.

3. Portugal has, therefore, a substantial force available to perform public security duties in a country of only 9 million people. While the military's capabilities are not impressive in the context of an attack by a well-armed force from outside the country, they are well-trained and experienced in counter-insurgency. Portuguese training, tactics and equipment have all been geared to keeping order in restive colonies and combatting challenges from guerilla troops. If the military were in basic sympathy with the leadership of the country, and if they were well-disciplined and well-led, they could maintain public order and provide a solid base of support for the Armed Forces Movement and the revolution. Evidently, however, this is not the case.

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Called upon to manage demonstrations and provide security, units from all of the services have proved ineffectual and unpredictable. Several times units or portions of units have defected to join the protesters. Many men openly defy the authority of unit commanders, and the commanders themselves have disobeyed orders. And clearly a sharp split in political sympathy is developing within the armed services and the AFM itself.

Evidence of Divided Sympathies

4. An attempt to identify the political sympathies of military units and their leaders in order to predict the shape and outcome of Portugal's current troubles was substantially unsuccessful. The situation has been in flux ever since the April 1974 revolt; unit leaders have been transferred, purged, or promoted with such rapidity that it is difficult to keep up with their names, much less their political leanings. Moreover, the political leanings of unit leaders does not provide a very significant guide to the sympathies among the junior officers and troops under them. The recent incident in which the commander of COPCON's army commando regiment was first purged and then reinstated is instructive. Pro-Communist troops under his command evidently worked to have him removed because of his moderate views, but the ensuing uproar from all levels convinced Carvalho that he must be taken back. This series of events suggests that even this unit, which is generally regarded as perhaps the most reliable force available to the current leadership, would have to take a vote before obeying a divisive order.

5. In general, political sympathies vary among the military regions (see map for location of regions). The 2,000-man military police regiment in the Lisbon Military Region, the largest unit in that area, is generally considered to be leftist and extremely loyal to its pro-Communist commander Carlos Campos de Andrada; yet this unit was created out of two cavalry regiments which were abolished because their leaders were thought to be too moderate.

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6. The Lisbon artillery regiment is well-known as one of the principal bases of support for the leftward trend the AFM has taken during the past 16 months. It was this unit which created the first sergeants' committee within the armed forces, and it has demonstrated a desire to act as an independent agent of political justice against the "enemies of the revolution." To some extent, most of the army units in the Lisbon area appear to share this orientation.

7. In the north military units appear to reflect the dominant conservative nature of the region--a fact which should not be surprising given the army's policy of assigning enlisted men to bases near their homes. The Commander of the Northern Military Region, Brigadier General Eurico Corvacho, is a militant leftist who has openly stated his support for the communists and has reportedly been training left-wing militia personnel in the units under his command. Yet northern army units have refused to discipline violent anti-communist crowds which have destroyed PCP headquarters and attacked PCP workers in recent days, forcing the government to bring in units from the Lisbon area and, more recently, marines from COPCON.

8. The commanders of the central and southern military regions have allied themselves with the moderates in the current leadership crisis. They are among the nine members of the Revolutionary Council purged because of their support for the document attributed to former foreign minister antunes, which was critical of the ruling regime. Unlike their colleagues, these two commanders, Brigadier Generals Carlos Charais and Pedro Pezarat Correia, were allowed to retain their military commands after units assigned to the Central Military Region made clear their support for their commander. While anti-Communist disturbances in these two military regions have not reached the level they have in the north, and military police have maintained order, it seems that the moderates have the support of a majority of military personnel and units here as well.

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9. Certain branches within the army are generally regarded as having an overall political orientation. Officers of the light artillery and engineering branches of the army, for example, are thought to lean to the left. The infantry and cavalry arms, on the other hand, are considered suspect by AFM leftists.

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the entire cavalry wing is slated for extinction because of its moderate political orientation. Several of the military schools are regarded by leftists as hotbeds of moderate opinion. The Santarem cavalry school and the infantry school within the Lisbon Military Region where its activities could be more easily controlled. Classes at the national military academy have been suspended pending reorganization of its curriculum and structure by a committee of professors, students, sergeants, and civilians. The academy has been the scene of confrontation between radicals and moderates since it became clear that the revolution was being dominated by leftist officers.

10. The navy has been regarded since the April 1974 revolution (and historically) as the most radical of Portugal's three services, and the marine battalion contributed by the navy to COPCON has been considered the most dependably left-wing of the COPCON units. A group of young, militant officers appears to have had greater success in the navy than in the other services in installing reliable leftists in all key operational billets. Recently, however, signs of a dissident movement within the navy began to surface, and reports from a variety of sources now indicate that there is a substantial body of frustrated moderates anxious to right the balance in the leftward direction the country's leadership is taking.

11. The air force has suffered from the widespread impression that it is the most right-wing of the three services. Pilots and administrators at Air Base 3 at Tancos and Air Base 5 at Montereal were compromised in the abortive coup attempt on 11 March, and the paratroop unit stationed at Tancos actually attacked the Lisbon artillery regiment in that uprising, apparently under

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the misapprehension that the artillery unit was staging a revolt. Air Force Chief Mendes Dias was dismissed in May because he deplored the decay of traditional military discipline and professionalism. He and his successor General Morais da Silva attempted through political training and a redefinition of the air force's mission to bring the service more in line with the aims and viewpoint of the AMF leadership but it is clear that they have not succeeded in mitigating the leftists' suspicion of the air force.

12. The political orientation of the air force officers and units could play an important part in the outcome of any breakdown in public order, and most especially, in a major confrontation within the armed forces. As a part of COPCON, the Tancos paratroop unit has been earmarked for use in internal security actions. It does not seem to have been used thus far in the current disorders, although security police from Air Base 5 were deployed against protests at Leiria in the Central Military Region. Should the growing division within the armed forces degenerate into civil war, the capability of the air force for close air support could be a decisive element. The current Portuguese aircraft inventory, although largely obsolete, could be very effectively used in support of or in opposition to domestic insurgency. These aircraft include some 26 tactical fighter aircraft, 24 transport planes, 35 helicopters, and 115 trainers which are not configured for combat, but which could be fitted for a weapons delivery capability. Ten ASW planes and a number of light general purpose aircraft are also available.

13. Quite apart from the problem of political loyalty is the question whether Portuguese troops can any longer be depended upon for any military purpose. Traditional discipline in the armed services has been so eroded by the events of the sixteen months since April 1974 and the policies of the Armed Forces Movement that few units can be counted upon to follow orders without question. Commanders have been required to clear orders with

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sergeants' councils, and enlisted men and junior officers have been able to have commanders relieved. 25X1X6

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Some months ago, [REDACTED] discipline within the ranks was virtually non-existent; [REDACTED] not a single unit could be counted upon to act on government orders.

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14. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] As long ago as January, army units proved unreliable in controlling a demonstration in Oporto. A rifle company refused to go to the Azores in June, and a COPCON paratroop unit balked at orders to go to Angola in July. Recent reports from Angola make it clear that troops serving there are no longer willing to risk their lives in that losing battle: theoretically, these troops constitute a large reserve which could be brought back to the metropole if circumstances demand it, but they might be even more reluctant to fight against their own people.

Recent Trends

15. Although the political sympathies of the military are by no means clear, the evidence of the last two weeks indicates that there is now a large and growing segment--probably a large majority--of the armed forces which prefers a slower, more evolutionary approach to socialism and a pluralist political system. The knowledge that this approach is preferred by the majority of the Portuguese people appears to have given some backbone to officers who have long felt this way. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] have been well aware that there was a considerable body of moderate officers, but after the fiasco of 11 March those men seemed paralyzed--unwilling to risk being caught opposing the government and unable to act without the assurance of substantial outside support.

16. Where earlier it seemed possible that a large proportion of the junior officers, NCO's and troops were as radical as those in the highly visible units

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in the Lisbon Military Region that now does not seem to be the case. It may be that the failure of the AFM to rule Portugal effectively, especially its failure to correct the deteriorating economic situation, brought about a change in opinion within the armed services. But it may also be that such a division in political orientation existed all along, but that the moderates were swept along by what appeared to be an irresistible leftward tide.

17. There has been a tendency so far for Portuguese military moderates to wait to see which way the wind was blowing, but the current outburst of civilian militancy has forced the issue. If it is true, as is claimed, that some 85 percent of the military support the "moderate manifesto," the outcome of this struggle may be assured with little further violence. The triumvirate ruling the country at the moment and the PCP itself may be forced to come to terms with the overwhelming sentiment among military and civilians for a moderate approach. It may now be the leftist individuals and military units which will trim their sails to the prevailing winds. But if the country's rulers do not find a compromise solution, or if the radicals refuse to accept their setback, violent confrontation among civilian or military factions is likely. On the other hand, given their past record, the armed forces may hesitate to risk commitment, until the outcome of the political confrontation seems clear.

